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## ANNOUNCEMENT

# Gunnar Bergenholtz retires



Time flies. It feels like only yesterday (some people say, it corresponds to almost 35 years in real time, but it can't be true) that I met Gunnar for the first time. I was a student at the Gothenburg dental school starting my studies in Endodontology, and he was a newly appointed Assistant Professor at the department. He had arrived from a private practice located in the small village of Surte just outside Gothenburg, where he had spent some years working with the expert clinician K-G Olsson. I soon learned, the hard way, that Gunnar was hot-tempered, but I also learned that he was a very good teacher and easy to make friends with.

Gunnar was actually born 'in exile' in Argentina and for practical reasons he was also given the Spanish name Roberto. However, the family returned to Sweden and Gunnar was raised in the city of Arvika in the heart of Selma Lagerlöf's beautiful Värmland. The cold and snowy winters provided an excellent platform for winter sports, and Gunnar soon became interested and skilled in bandy, a team sport similar to land hockey but played on ice. His keen interest in sports has remained and tennis and golf (handicap 11) have been two of his favourite activities.

Being the son of a confectioner, Gunnar developed a sweet tooth early on and became a gourmet as well as a gourmand when it comes to confectionery. What would not Freud have made out of the fact that Gunnar would later devote his professional life to battling the sequelae of caries. Freudian disciples will probably raise their eyebrows even further when they learn that

his elder brother, Axel, also became a dentist and ended his career as a Professor of Periodontology.

In order to study dentistry Gunnar went further north in Sweden to the city of Umeå. There he studied with Bure Engström, who woke his interest in Endodontology. Bure belonged to the second generation of Scandinavian academic endodontists (following in the footsteps of pioneers like Lars Z Strindberg and Birger Nygaard Østbye) and later held the chairs of Endodontology in Malmö, for a short period, as well as in Gothenburg. Umeå was nice to Gunnar. Besides studying dentistry, he played a lot of bridge (rumour says that he founded a monetary fortune) and most important of all he met his first wife, Simone. Together they had three children: Johan, Mattias and Ulrika, none of whom is involved in dentistry.

When Gunnar learned that a dental school was going to be opened in Gothenburg and that the department of Endodontology was to be chaired by Bure Engström, he became very interested. However, his interest primarily concerned his desire to obtain specialist training. He was determined to stay out of research. Luckily, a few years of academic life changed Gunnar's mind and an easygoing start included two papers on epidemiology and root canal microbiology, respectively. He soon became intrigued by the inflammatory process of the pulp, went to Ivar Mjör in Norway to learn the tricks of the experimental trade, and thus found the research area for which he is known and held in such a high esteem.

He defended his odont Dr thesis, 'Experimental pulpitis in the monkey' in 1977 (If you have not read the benchmark paper 'Experimental pulpitis in immunized monkeys' published in *Scandinavian Journal of Dental Research*, please do). The faculty's opponent was Larz Spångberg. A rather nervous and pale Gunnar defended his text from the serious attacks of a tough opponent in a glorious way. Those of us who attended the event still remember the honest discussion held at a very high scientific level. Some of us (but not so many) also remember the party afterwards disclosing other sides of Gunnar's personality: the bon vivant (well, sort of), always quick to a laugh and a glass of good wine (at a connoisseur level).

Research activities took Gunnar to the United States. First to Ann Arbor and later to Chapel Hill, where he

chaired the Department of Endodontology for 5 years. During this period, he developed an international network of personal contacts, published a series of important papers, mainly within the field of pulp biology, and lowered his golf handicap.

In 1989 Gunnar returned to Gothenburg to act as chair of the Department of Endodontology and Oral Diagnosis. His administrative talents were discovered and appreciated and he was soon appointed Dean of the Faculty. These were very difficult years for the faculty. A surplus of dentists led to a drastic reduction in the budget. However, Gunnar acted out of a deep knowledge of human nature and handled the situation exceedingly well.

I will not mention all the prizes and awards given to Gunnar, nor all the societies and associations in which he has been active. More important, over the years Gunnar has been a tremendous partner in scientific dialogue and discussion. His knowledge of Endodontology

is encyclopaedic and he is always ready to give a helping hand in every phase of the scientific process. Consequently, he is associated with a long list of national and international collaborators and is a much appreciated and demanded reviewer of papers. Recently, he also demonstrated his abilities to write and edit a textbook.

In a way, it will be a sad day when Gunnar retires and moves out of office. However, it is also a good day because from now on he will not have so many obligations and thus have more time for canoeing and golfing. He will also have more time for us, his colleagues and friends who appreciate his argumentative abilities and good judgement. And of course for Gunnar, retirement will be 'retirement' and must only be regarded as a new creative phase in his life. In this situation, I can think of no better words than those of Winston Churchill: "This is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end, it is only the end of the beginning".

*Claes Reit*

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